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Mystics Confound Mystery of a Vanished Millionaire

By Stanley Karnow

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BANGKOK — This Southeast Asian kingdom of Thailand, formerly known as Siam, thrives on political intrigue and tales of the supernatural. And it now has these ingredients combined to produce a headier mixture in the case of James H. W. Thompson, the millionaire American silk manufacturer who vanished last Easter Sunday.

The only solid fact in the case is that Thompson, spending that weekend in the hills of Malaysia, went out for an afternoon stroll and disappeared without leaving a trace.

In the eight days since, an assortment of Buddhist soothsayers, night club magicians and other mystics as well as private investigators, Asian experts and various kibitzers have advanced all sorts of theories as to Thompson's whereabouts. Several of these theories have given Thompson's family and friends fresh hopes and repeated disappointments, leaving the impression that the East is as mysterious as advertised.

A 'Lead' to Cambodia

NOT LONG AGO, for example, a few of his friends rushed down to Malaysia to check out a story that Thompson had dyed his hair red and was functioning as a fortune teller near the town of Ipoh. The story, of course, proved to be false.

Before that, a pair of Americans resident here, one of them an Army officer, considered chartering an airplane to rescue Thompson from a spot in northeastern Cambodia where, the rumor went, he was being held by the Ietcong. The would-be rescuers were dissuaded from carrying out their plan by U.S. officials who foresaw the dangers of a grave international incident.

Another theory holds that Thompson in Communist China negotiating the lease of former Thai Prime Minister Pridi Phanomyong, who has lived in exile in Canton for years and, it is known, has been seeking to join his family in Paris.

Many of these and other notions about Thompson stem from the extra-sensory powers or imaginations of a wondrous variety of divines who have taken part in the case. One is Bob McGowan, an Australian cabaret entertainer who supposedly can see through walls and who "saw" Thompson being held in a Cambodian village. Another is the celebrated Buddhist monk Kheo, who predicts that Thompson will eventually return here with "exciting political news."

The monk, a seer of immense prestige in Thailand, emerged from meditation last month to explain that Thompson was kidnaped by four Malay bandits in the employ of Hanoi and is presumably now in the process of settling the Vietnam war.

Thompson's relatives—a brother-in-law is Ames H. Douglas, President Eisenhower's Secretary of the Air Force—also hired Peter Hurkos, the Dutch-born psychic who featured in the case of the Boston Strangler. Like the others, Hurkos linked Thompson's disappearance to the Communists.

A Sister Murdered

THE IDEA of a Communist conspiracy was given added weight Aug. 31 when one of Thompson's sisters, Katherine Thompson Wood, was found murdered on her 14-acre estate near Wilmington, Del. This prompted fresh speculation that an international plot was unfolding that would threaten other members of Thompson's family.

Much of the political aroma in the puzzle apparently rises from Thompson's fascinating past. An architect by profession, he initially came to Southeast Asia in World War II as an agent of the OSS, the precursor of the CIA. In that capacity, he worked with Pridi, who led the Free Thai underground movement fighting the Japanese and was later ousted from office in a military coup d'etat.

As an OSS agent, Thompson was also active among the Laotian and Vietnamese nationalists in the postwar period. He was well liked even by those who were or became Commu-

nists, and though his own opinions were decidedly conservative, he tended to sympathize with the cause of Asian nationalism.

How these experiences might have made Thompson a victim of the Com-



Associated Press

James H. W. Thompson ... he didn't take his cigarettes.

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THOMPSON, JAMES H. W.

Continued

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